

REMARKS

Claims 8-26 are pending in this application. Claims 8-26 stand rejected.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C § 103:

Claims 8-13 and 17-26 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) as unpatentable over Kamikawa et al. (US 6,068,002) ("Kamikawa '002) in view of Kamikawa et al. (US 6,299,696) ("Kamikawa '696) and Kamikawa et al. (US Pub. 2003/0159718) ("Kamikawa '718).

Claims 8 and 20 recite, *inter alia*, a separation plate having an exhaust path of a drying fluid therein, and the exhaust path of the drying fluid passes the drying fluid from the drying room into the cleaning room. Claim 18 recites, *inter alia*, an exhaust path formed at a central portion of the separation plate, and the drying fluids supplied onto the substrate are exhausted from the drying room through the exhaust path and the exhausted drying fluids are passed into the cleaning room. Applicants respectfully submit that neither Kamikawa '002, Kamikawa '696, Kamikawa '718 nor any combinations thereof teaches or suggests the above claimed features.

The Examiner acknowledges that Kamikawa '002 and Kamikawa '718 do not disclose or suggest a separation plate having an exhaust path passing the drying fluid from the drying room into the cleaning room. For this element, the Examiner relies on Kamikawa '696. The Examiner states that "'696 teaches a shutter (or separation plate) (50) with an exhaust path (56) located between a semiconductor cleaning member (3) and drying chamber (140)". See page 4 of the Office Action. Applicants respectfully disagree.

Kamikawa '696 does not disclose or suggest a separation plate having an exhaust path passing the drying fluid from the drying chamber into the cleaning chamber. The Examiner refers to component (140) of Kamikawa '696 as a drying chamber. However, the component (140) is a box containing two chambers (2 and 4). Further, the component (140) cannot be a drying chamber because the shutter (7) of Kamikawa '696 does not separate the box (140) from a chamber. (For example, in the claimed embodiment, the separate plate is movable to separate the cleaning chamber and the drying chamber.) In contrast, the shutter (7) of Kamikawa '696 separates the first chamber (2) from the second chamber (4). As such, component (4) is a chamber, and the box (140) of Kamikawa '696 should not be construed as a chamber. This follows that, in Kamikawa '696, a drain pipe line (56) drains the fluid out of the first chamber (2) into the box (140), not into the second chamber (4). See e.g., Figs. 2 and 4 of Kamikawa '696. Therefore, in Kamikawa '696, the drying fluid does not pass between the chambers (2 and 4) through an exhaust path in the shutter (7).

Furthermore, applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's assertion that Kamikawa '696 discloses a semiconductor cleaning chamber (3) and a drying chamber (140). In stark contrast, Kamikawa '696 describes that element 3 is a vessel for a drying process and element 140 is a box. Furthermore, in the claimed embodiment, a drying chamber is disposed over a cleaning chamber, and the drying fluid passes from the drying chamber into the cleaning chamber. In stark contrast, in Kamikawa '696, if element 3 refers to a cleaning chamber and element 140 refers to a drying chamber as asserted by the Examiner, the cleaning chamber 3 is disposed over the drying chamber 140, and the drying fluid passes from the cleaning chamber 3 into the drying chamber 140.

Accordingly, even assuming, *arguendo*, that the above references were combined, the combination does not disclose or suggest a separation plate having an exhaust path passing the drying fluid from the drying room into the cleaning room.

Thus, claims 8, 18 and 20 are not rendered obvious by the above references. As claims 9-12, 17, 19 and 21-26 depend from claims 8, 18 and 20, respectively, they are also not rendered obvious by the above references for at least these reasons.

Based on the arguments above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 8-13 and 17-26 under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) is respectfully requested.

Claims 14 and 15 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) as unpatentable over '002, '718 and '696 as applied to claim 13 above and further in view of Kikuchi et al. (US 5,226,056).

As discussed above, '002, '718 and '696 do not teach or suggest a separation plate having an exhaust path of a drying fluid therein, and the exhaust path of the drying fluid passes the drying fluid from the drying room into the cleaning room, as claimed in claim 8. Kikuchi, which is only directed to a method for plasma ashing a resist film, does not cure the deficiency of '002, '718 and '696 references. Based on the above, independent claim 8 is patentable over '002, '718, '696 in view of Kikuchi. Since claims 14 and 15 depend from claim 8, claims 14 and 15 are also patentable.

Based on the arguments above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 14 and 15 under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) is respectfully requested.

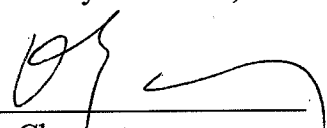
Claim 16 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) as unpatentable over '002, '718, '696 and Kikuchi as applied to claim 15 above and further in view of Drexler et al. (US 5,524,361).

As discussed above, '002, '718, '696 and Kikuchi do not teach or suggest a separation plate having an exhaust path of a drying fluid therein, and the exhaust path of the drying fluid passes the drying fluid from the drying room into the cleaning room, as claimed in claim 8. Drechter, which is only directed to a method of drying wood chips, does not cure the deficiency of '002, '718, '696 references and Kikuchi. Based on the above, independent claim 8 is patentable over '002, '718, '696, Kikuchi in view of Drechter. Since claim 16 depends from claim 8, claim 16 is also patentable.

Based on the arguments above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claim 16 under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) is respectfully requested.

For the foregoing reasons, the present application is believed to be in condition for allowance. The Examiner's early and favorable action is respectfully requested. The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned if he has any questions or comments in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,



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